

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 L-03 SAB-02 INR-07
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-----118810 051835Z /42

O R 051530Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8309
INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY MEXICO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 3572

STADIS////////////////////

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, PN, CS
SUBJECT: CONSULTATIONS WITH ODUBER AND FACIO RE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS

REF: (A) STATE 178801; (B) STATE 181848

1. SUMMARY. PANAMA CANAL NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED ON THREE DIFFERENT OCCASIONS WITH HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOCR DURING PAST TWO WEEKS. WHILE GOCR OFFICIALS ARE DISINCLINED TO QUALIFY SPECIFIC DETAILS OF US AND PANAMANIAN DIFFERENCES, THEY ARE WELL-INFORMED ON STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS AND OF POLITICAL RISKS OF PROLONGING NEGOTIATION PROCESS. THEY ARE HOPEFUL NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE TERMINATED SOON AND THAT BOGOTA MEETING WILL BE HELPFUL TO BOTH PARTIES.

2. FOLLOWING ORIENTATION VISIT MADE PREVIOUS WEEK TO CANAL ZONE, AMBASSADOR TOOK ADVANTAGE OF VISIT WITH FONMIN FACIO JULY 27 TO BRIEF FONMIN ON PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF SITUATION. BASING REMARKS ON MEETINGS AT USCINCSO, CANAL HEADQUARTERS, AND EMBASSY PANAMA, AMBASSADOR OUTLINED
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CURRENT STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS, ABOUT WHICH FACIO APPEARED TO BE FAIRLY WELL INFORMED. FACIO NOTED THAT HE AND ODUBER WERE BOTH AWARE OF AND APPRECIATED US DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS, AND FELT STRONGLY THAT NEGOTIATIONS MUST BE COMPLETED THIS YEAR IN ORDER TO HAVE ANY CHANCE OF EARLY SENATE RATIFICATION. BOTH FACIO AND ODUBER HAVE REITERATED THIS POINT IN SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS.

3. ON BASIS REF A, AMBASSADOR, ACCOMPANIED BY POLOFF, MET WITH FACIO AUGUST 3 TO REVIEW US POSITION IN MORE DETAIL AND TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS FACIO MIGHT HAVE PRIOR TO BOGOTA MEETING. AGAIN, FACIO SHOWED HIMSELF TO BE WELL INFORMED ABOUT STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS, NOTING THAT PRESIDENT ODUBER HAD COVERED POINTS WITH HIM FOLLOWING ODUBER'S MEETING EARLIER IN WEEK WITH TORRIJOS. FACIO SAID THAT TORRIJOS WAS OF VIEW THAT BOGOTA SUMMIT MEETING WOULD PRODUCE LA SUPPORT OF A NEW TREATY WHICH COULD BE OF ASSISTANCE TO PRESIDENT CARTER IN HIS ATTEMPT TO SELL TREATY TO US PUBLIC AND SENATE. FACIO STATED THAT COSTA RICA SAW MERIT IN THIS COURSE OF ACTION.

4. ON BASIS OF ADDITIONAL DETAILED INFORMATION RECEIVED IN REF B, AMBASSADOR AND DCM MET AUGUST 4 WITH BOTH PRESIDENT ODUBER AND FONMIN FACIO. IN REVIEWING INFORMATION PROVIDED IN SPREAD SHEET, AMBASSADOR EMPHASIZED THAT US REASONED RESPONSES TO MANY OF PANAMA'S POSITIONS HAD BEEN MET WITH AN INCREASING OF THE ANTE ON PANAMA'S SIDE, AND THAT PRESIDENT CARTER SOUGHT TO MAKE CLEAR IN HIS LETTER TO TORRIJOS POLITELY AND FIRMLY THAT US COULD NOT CONTINUE TO MAKE ADDITIONAL SIGNIFICANT CONCESSIONS TO PANAMA.

5. ODUBER SAID THAT HE HAD READ LETTER IN PANAMA DURING
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LAST VISIT, WHICH HE HAD MADE TO ATTEND A WEDDING, NOT SPECIFICALLY TO CONSULT WITH TORRIJOS. HE SAID HE WAS ALARMED BY PANAMANIAN REACTION TO LETTER, WHICH HE CHARACTERIZED AS EITHER VERY OPTIMISTIC OR VERY PESSIMISTIC, DEPENDING ON WHO WAS READING IT. AFTER READING LETTER, HE SAID, HE COUNSELED FONMIN AND SOME MEMBERS OF NEGOTIATING TEAM TO INTERPRET LETTER AS CANDID AND SINCERE STATEMENT OF PRESIDENT'S VIEWS. HE ALSO URGED THEM TO CONSIDER SERIOUS RISKS INVOLVED FOR PRESIDENT CARTER OR ANY POLITICAL FIGURE IN PLACING HIS AUTHORITY AND PRESTIGE BEHIND THAT KIND OF EFFORT TO HASTEN THE END TO AN IMPORTANT NEGOTIATING PROCESS.

6. ODUBER SAID THAT HE WAS PERSUADED THAT US HAD NEGOTIATED WITH PANAMA IN GOOD FAITH, THAT PANAMANIAN INCONSISTENCY HAD BOTH SURPRISED AND PERPLEXED HIM, BUT THAT IN HIS VIEW THE TIME HAD COME TO TERMINATE THE NEGOTIATIONS AND TO GET A NEW TREATY SIGNED. HE SAID THAT HE AND PRESIDENTS LOPEZ PORTILLO, PEREZ, AND LOPEZ MICHELSEN RECOGNIZED THE STRENGTH OF THE OPPOSITION TO A NEW TREATY WITHIN THE US. THEY WERE ALSO AWARE THAT TORRIJOS WAS UNDER STRONG ATTACK IN CERTAIN CIRCLES IN PANAMA FOR TAKING TOO SOFT A POSITION IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. HE SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD PURPOSE

OF BOGOTA MEETING WAS TO HELP BOTH PRESIDENT CARTER AND TORRIJOS WITH THEIR DOMESTIC PROBLEMS RE A NEW TREATY.

7. FINALLY, ODUBER REPEATED A SUGGESTION HE SAID HE HAD MADE EARLIER TO AMBASSADOR TODMAN, I.E., WHEN THE TIME ARRIVES FOR SIGNING OF A NEW TREATY, IT WOULD BE A MASTERFUL POLITICAL STROKE WITH GLOBAL IMPACT IF PRESIDENT CARTER WERE TO SIGN IT IN PANAMA AT A MEETING OF LATIN CHIEFS OF STATE, OR AT LEAST CHIEFS OF STATE OF CENTRAL AMERICA AND OTHER NATIONS REPRESENTED AT BOGOTA MEETING. WEISSMAN

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